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THE IMPLICATION OF GOOD.

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THE idea of Good lies at the root of all ethical construction, and progressive attempts to unfold its significance are therefore justifiable.

I.

At the outset of this effort it is important to note that, in recent years, a school of thinkers has arisen which asserts that Good and Bad, together with other fundamental notions and experiences, are indefinable in any sense. This school may be described as a new form of Intuitionism; for, although it rejects the older view of the indefinability and self-evidence of judgments concerning right and wrong, yet it affirms these characteristics of Good and Bad and also of certain other so-called "simple" notions. This view, generally, is based upon the conception of analysis. We are said to know things by analysing them into their constituent parts. We can define them as a result of this analysis, for a definition states what parts invariably constitute a given whole. Now the result of this analysis is to lead us to certain ultimates which are incapable of being subjected to further analysis. Such ultimates are simple, they cannot be defined because they have no parts. they are themselves the final elements out of which definitions are constructed. These elements, of which we think, or are otherwise aware can never be made known to anyone who cannot experience them directly. Propositions concerning them must all be synthetic. Among such ultimates certain writers include various data presented to the senses such as yellow and sweet, the self, certain axioms. and also good and bad. Such a view would seem inevitably to lead to that attitude of empiricism which Professor James described as the habit of explaining wholes by parts, which parts may be considered in isolation from the whole without losing any aspect of their significance. In this view the world consists, as it appears to common sense, of an indefinite number of independent beings each of which is unique, irreducible and finite. Each aspect of our experience presents such beings of which red, shrill, hard, good, beauty, happiness, and each individual self are probably examples. Between these real and independent beings relations exist which bind them into wholes of greater or less complexity. But these relations imply neither any complexity nor any intrinsic property, in the nature of the elements they combine, and in virtue of which the relations exist. Relations, in this view, are purely external, the constituent of a complex is entirely identical, as a constituent, with what it is considered by itself in isolation from any relation. For, although, when a particular thing forms part of a whole, it possesses a predicate which it would not otherwise possess, this predicate in no wav alters the nature of the thing nor does it enter into its definition. The relation of the part to the whole is, then, not to be regarded as analogous to that of the whole to the part, for the whole implies the part analytically, but the part in no way implies the whole. The universe is, according to this view, to be explained by reference to parts, but it is not to be regarded as a whole; for the absolute sum-total of things may never be so related as to form a whole. "Reality may only ever be a distributed and imperfectly unified collection, wherein each individual person, each separate fact, each aspect of experience, and even God Himself, is a unique, irreducible, simple and finite individual."

It is worth noting, however, that all advocates of this new intuitionism do not follow their empirical atomism to its logically complete conclusion. Mr. G. E. Moore, for example, modifies it in an interesting way. He asserts that although wholes are not to be regarded as organic unities from the point of view of existence they may very well be so regarded from the point of view of value. In other words, he says, the whole is not organic in the sense that the part implies the whole and reflects its nature, yet

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it is organic in the sense that the value of the whole is greater than the sum of the values of the parts. Only from the point of view of existence, not from that of value, can the whole be accounted for by a mere analysis of its parts. It is not necessary to examine this contention in detail for it has little direct bearing upon the subject of this chapter. The point with which we are here concerned is, that if we accept this view that good and bad are simple indefinable notions—then the science of ethics would just rest upon this ultimate distinction in thought and would proceed to give an account of "the Good" or the things of which good can be predicated from a moral point of view.

Such a view is, however, based upon a general metaphysical theory which may be described as a logical atomism, and which we are, by no means, obliged to accept. If our general metaphysical position is of an organic type, such as was put forward by Aristotle in ancient, and Hegel in modern times, then we shall neither seek to define by means of analysis, nor attempt to explain the universe in terms of its parts. These last have only a relative independence—the parts imply the whole just as the whole implies the parts. In order to get the full truth about anything we must regard it in relation to the whole of everything. "Isolate a thing from its relations," said Dr. Edward Caird, "and try to assert it by itself, you find it has negated itself as well as its relations." The thing in itself is nothing. The effort to define on this view, then, is not an effort to resolve a thing into separate parts, each of which are relatively simple, but an attempt to see the thing in all its intrinsic relations to the whole of which it forms a part. A final definition in this sense would, of course, involve perfect knowledge; actual definitions must, accordingly, be progressive efforts whereby we more and more fully unfold the significance of the members of one organic experience. Such ultimate conceptions as good and bad are, then, to be defined by means of an examination of the various ways in which they are involved in the system of our experience, and if we can arrive at some

measure of understanding of this, we ought to feel that we have in that measure attained the only true form of definition.

II.

It is evident at the outset of this examination that the significance of good and bad, when used as predicates, is very various. In some cases there is a moral implication but more frequently there is not. We may, for instance, speak of various material objects such as coal as good; in other senses we speak of a work of art, a scientific theory, generosity, the cardinal virtues, and love as respectively good; and it is clear that in each of these connections we mean something different. On a cursory examination it seems that we mean successively:—good for a certain purpose, beautiful, useful for colligating or describing facts, conditionally good, partial manifestations or particular differentiations of the good, and absolutely or ultimately good.

In order to arrive at the kind of definition which we are seeking it would be necessary to find out precisely what is meant in each of these cases and to discover what, if any, is the common element of meaning, on the ground of the presence of which, a single predicate is applicable.

Mr. Herbert Spencer adopted the view that where good is predicated it is always possible to define it in terms of means and end, or more particularly, in terms of adaptation to an end. The predication of good thus implies the promotion of adaptation, the predication of bad, the hindrance of it. On such a view goodness and badness are not characteristics of any object per se, but are relations which exist between the object and something else which is regarded as an end. But this definition is far from being ultimate for when we ask what these conceptions of adaptation and maladaptation imply, we find that they only have significance with reference to some being who has aims or ends which he seeks. Two things can only be said to be maladapted if they are in a relation in which they ought not to

be if a certain end is to be realised. Thus, in the case of a ship, if there are human beings for whose purposes it is essential that it shall float in a certain position, it can be said to be maladapted only when the centres of gravity and buoyancy are respectively so situated that equilibrium in that position is impossible. Apart from this desire on the part of human beings, the ship that turns over as soon as it is launched is neither less good nor less adapted than the one that retains the upright position. The concept of unattained ends, therefore, is necessary before adaptation or maladaptation can have any meaning. To assert, that the predication of good is the affirmation of adaptation to some end that is itself regarded as good, is a circulus in definiendo. To avoid this it would be necessary to find out what things there are which can be regarded as ultimately good, in which case good could be defined in terms of each of these. But in doing this, we should, of course, be completely giving up the conception that good consists in adaptation. When we speak of love as good we certainly do not merely mean that it is adapted to the attainment of some further good. Again, when Plato spoke of courage, wisdom, temperance and justice as good he does not seem to have regarded them as means to the attainment of "the Good" but rather as partial manifestations of it which in some measure shadowed its complete perfection. With reference to Mr. Spencer's interpretation of the predicate good, our conclusion, therefore, is that where it is applicable it is a definition in a circle, and that where good is really predicated of an object per se, then the conception of adaptation is not really applicable at all.

Confining ourselves now to cases where good is predicated of an object in an ultimate sense, that is to say, where good is not reducible to some other conception such as useful, beautiful, true and so on, in which case the term is only used at all through an illegitimate transfer of meaning, we find that there are a number of objects which at different times have been regarded as ultimately good. Socrates believed knowledge to be so; Aristotle, self-realisation; the

Ascetics, self-sacrifice; Christ, love; Kant, the good will; Mr. Spencer, fulness of life; the Pragmatists, utility; and so on.

It would be neither possible nor relevant here to examine the claims of these various objects to be so regarded as good. To do so would involve a careful consideration of "the good" or the ethical end. What concerns us at present is the question, whether in each case that we predicate good, in an ultimate sense, there is not some common aspect of meaning, and if we can discern this we shall, in some measure, have unfolded the significance of good.

III.

In the first place it does seem to be true that the predication of good is universally related to the wills of persons. It rests upon the fact of will and preference. Good, generally, is that which satisfies desire; moreover, to say that we prefer one thing to another is to say that we regard one thing as better than another, or the one as relatively good and the other as relatively bad. Apart from this experience of preference one could not possibly say that any one thing was better than another, the most that could be affirmed would be that it was different. If one could imagine oneself to be completely indifferent to all possible objects of experience, to neither desire any of them nor to have any inclination to choose some rather than others, then the objects of experience would simply be, they could not possibly be regarded as either good or bad. To predicate good of a thing means, accordingly, that it is in some measure willed, and this implies further that this object is regarded as capable of satisfying a conscious want or unfulfilled desire and also that it is chosen in preference to other objects. On the other hand, to predicate bad of a thing means that it is in some measure an object of aversion, that it is regarded as inconsistent with the satisfaction of some conscious want or unfulfilled desire and also that other objects are chosen in preference to it.

This then is, at any rate, part of the significance of good and bad and is, accordingly, a tentative definition. brings us in fact very near to the position of Aristotle when he defined the good as that at which all things aim.

IV.

Concerning the actual existence of the thing of which good can be predicated, that is to say, of the object of choice or desire we say that it "ought to be" of such a particular nature. We say, for example, that a pulley should have no weight, a work of art should be sincere, a scientific theory ought to colligate a wide range of facts, a man ought to tell the truth and so on. When we make such statements as these we have an ideal in thought or object of desire on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a demand that existence in fact shall correspond with this ideal. It is accordingly to be observed that all judgments of either obligation or value imply two existences, mind or ideas on the one hand and objects or things on the other. Both of these existences are real and the conception of value arises through the relation which the one bears to the other.

In considering the general meaning of good, we have not, up to this point, considered the term specially in its moral signification. Here the term does, in truth, seem to possess additional connotation but it is not easy to state precisely what this is. Mr. Bradley maintains that, whereas for goodness generally an idea must be present and existence be found to be in accordance with the idea, in the case of moral goodness, existence must not only be found to be in accordance with the idea but the idea itself must necessarily have produced or realised itself in the It is not only that an idea has an answering content in fact, but in addition also it has made or brought about that correspondence. The idea has translated itself into

¹Appearance and Reality, chapter XXV.

reality, the content on both sides is the same, and existence has become what it is through the action of the idea. This distinction seems to embody the truth that was urged by Aristotle when he said that virtue is an activity or an ένέργεια. Although this does seem to be true of the morally good it does not, however, appear to be peculiar to it, and so it cannot really be regarded as its differentia. Indeed the same thing would seem to apply to most mechanical constructions and inventions. Here also there is usually present, in the first instance, an idea of a desired object which must possess various characteristics and an existence is made or invented in accordance with the idea. The idea has thus brought about the existence of a corresponding object in fact. It does not seem possible, therefore, to follow Mr. Bradley in his view that the predication of goodness, in this sense, is confined to the sphere of morality.

It is not easy to say with certainty what precisely is the differentia of good in this sphere, in other words, to determine what makes the signification of "ought" so different when we say that a man ought to love his neighbour, from that when we say that a pulley ought to have no weight. It seems, at any rate, that there is a difference of complexity in the two cases. In the general predication of good there is a human will with its ideal or purpose, on the one hand, and this is in a certain relation to some existence or external fact on the other. Two realities here seem to be involved. In the case of the morally good there is again the individual will with its ideal or purpose existing in a certain relation to some external object but there is also the standardised will, or system of purposes that represents the moral order and will of society in relation to the same external object. realities, accordingly, seem to be involved here. Beyond this difference of complexity in the two cases there are of course further differences. The criterion of value is not the same, nor, indeed, is the object to which the quality of value is attached. In the case of good generally, the criterion of value is the purpose or ideal of the will concerned and objects are called good or bad according as they harmonise or conflict with this; whereas, in the case of the morally good, the criterion of value is the relation of the standard will to its object and individual wills are called good or bad according as their relations to the same object correspond to or conflict with this. Good, therefore, in the general sense, is regarded as a value attaching to things and, in the moral sense, as a value attaching to wills, but in reality neither account is quite correct. Goodness and badness do not attach to objects or things in isolation from the wills of persons; nor, on the other hand, do they, as Kant maintained, attach to the mind of will out of relation to things. They attach only to objects regarded in relation to ideals or wills, and to wills regarded in relation to their objects.¹

V.

It follows from all that has been said of good generally that we must recognise degrees in the perfection of goodness. Although the objects of choice, or objects which are regarded as satisfying the demands of the will concerned, are to be regarded on that account as good, it is obvious that they are not all to be regarded as equally good. In other words, when a man chooses or wills an object of a particular kind he regards it as good from the point of view that he occupies at that time. From another point of view the same object would be regarded as bad for it would completely fail to satisfy the will which issued from this

¹ I am very well aware that this account of the distinction between the two modes of predication is neither exhaustive nor convincing. It probably involves far more than has been indicated above. It may be the case that, only in the moral sense, can good be properly predicated at all. In every other sphere its signification may be reducible to some other conception such as the useful, the consistent, the beautiful. If this is so, the "ought" involved would be conditional, not categorical, wherever the predicate which has to be substituted is not one of those things which must be regarded as ultimately good. Thus, a pulley ought to have no weight only if the principles of mechanics are to be applicable to it; but, a man ought to love his neighbour unconditionally because the standard mind recognises this relation to be ultimately good.

different universe. Much that society regards as bad today is a survival of what was once regarded as praiseworthy conduct and we may suppose that much that we approve to-day will be regarded with disapproval by posterity. There are, indeed, all degrees in the perfection of goodness and in relation to the higher good the lower becomes sheer bad. The fact that good and bad in experience are relative distinctions depends upon the fact that no object in experience ever completely satisfies us, every actual good points beyond itself and is relative to "The Good." Accordingly, the distinction between good and bad is not analogous, as Mr. Moore suggests, to that between colours. Professor J. S. Mackenzie compares it rather with that between more and less and his comparison is very convincing. Just as you cannot appreciate the significance of more, without appreciating the significance of less; so, you cannot appreciate the significance of good without appreciating the significance of bad. Again, just as more becomes less when viewed from the point of view of the greater more; so, good becomes bad when viewed from the point of view of the more perfect good. Finally, just as you cannot conceive of a consciousness in which the distinction between more and less was not operative; so, you cannot conceive of one that did not involve preference in other words—one in which the distinction between good and bad was not perpetually exercised.

VI.

This conception of degrees in the perfection of goodness leads one to ask what is the criterion whereby we are enabled to distinguish the more from the less perfect good—the more perfect good being that which is more nearly identical with this standard than the less perfect good. Accordingly, it is that which would require less addition or modification in order to become congruent with the perfect good than the less perfect good. Every judgment of value inevitably implies the existence of some standardised or organised point of view by comparison with which particular exist-

ences are evaluated. This has been apparent throughout the preceding pages where reference has repeatedly been made to the standardised mind or will. What then is this criterion? Various accounts of it in the moral sphere have been given at different times. Thus, it is described by Adam Smith in terms of the "Impartial Spectator," by Clifford in terms of the "tribal self," by the man in the street in terms of common sense, and by others in terms of the "normal man," the "ethos" of a people. All of these conceptions depend upon the view that our judgments of moral value imply a reference to some point of view that is more universal and authoritative than that of the individual who acts.

In our own time Dr. S. Alexander propounds an interesting evolutionary conception of the standard mind. He maintains that all judgments of moral value arise in connection with social institutions. These embody the good and are the result of the adaptation of human beings to each other in society. Moral laws are said to be the principles of conciliation which maintain these institutions, they are accordingly the foundation upon which the adapted condition of society rests. The relation of an individual will to its object is thus said to be good if it is coherent with the relation of the agents whose wills maintain these institutions to the same object.¹

This account, while embodying a good deal of truth, hardly seems to be capable, without exaggeration, of accounting for all our moral judgments of good. It is true that acts which we call good do, on the whole, tend to maintain social institutions, and that these moreover, do seem to be embodiments of the morality, "ethos," or "Sitten," of the people. Also, since adaptation is progressive this explains why social institutions, and judgments of good based thereon, exhibit a progressive evolution. But, on the other hand, the attempt to interpret the standard mind in this way is open to all the traditional objections that have

 $^{^{1}\,}Moral~Order~and~Progress,$ p. 253 et seq., and the Gifford~Lectures, Course II, Sec. VIII.

from time to time been urged against the moral code as a criterion of morality. For, no system of laws that could arise in connection with the maintenance of social institutions can be so exhaustive as to include within its scope every attitude of will or choice which we must regard as either good or bad. According to Dr. Alexander, honesty is a virtue of commercial exchange, chastity the virtue of abstaining from unlawful relations, but it is obvious that such an interpretation could not, without exaggeration, be strained to include all the various forms of honestv and chastity that we recognise as good. True, honesty is not confined to commercial exchange, it is something that involves the whole man and enters into every relation of life. It includes absolute sincerity of mind, hatred of falsehood in any form, ever readiness to learn the true lessons of experience undistorted by prejudice or blindness of Similarly, against the doctrine that chastity consists in abstention, it is to be urged that it consists rather in the spirit in which we contemplate things in the world around us. "Unto the pure all things are pure." There is of course an intimate relation between a clean life and a clean heart but a person may refrain from entering into any unlawful relations and vet be unchaste and inherently vile. Hence, though the criterion of many of the attitudes of will that we can call good or bad may be the legalised response of man's nature to the various social institutions, this is not an adequate criterion for all of them.

A further objection to this view is, that the judgments of value based upon it will be conflicting and incongruous. In the social life we have many masters, often in following the one we must desert the other and we are perforce led to ask—Which is the higher institution? To this question Dr. Alexander's criterion affords no answer. Finally, the moral spirit of the best men teaches them that, while loyalty to social institutions is good, yet it alone is not good enough. These institutions and their laws have their

¹ Moral Order and Progress, p. 253.

shortcomings; they represent in fact, the evolutionary stage of the majority, and though it is right, in a measure, to respect majorities it is wrong to bow before them as infallible; for the wills of majorities are not stationary things, they and the corresponding social institutions, develop from lower to higher; but they do so, not mainly through a non-voluntary process of natural selection, but because the best men at each stage set themselves to establish a higher atmosphere and criterion of good than is embodied in the institutions around them. The criterion of good for them, therefore, rests not upon what existing institutions are, but rather upon what they have in them to be.

VII.

The consideration of Dr. Alexander's view is very fruitful in suggestion as to the true nature of the standardised point of view by comparison with which particular attitudes of will are evaluated. It certainly seems to be the case, as Dr. Alexander maintains, that men's ordinary judgments of moral value have reference to a point of view that is intimately associated with the existing state of society. The point of view or standard, which seems to be most generally employed, has been aptly described by Professor Mackenzie as the "ethos" of a people or the morality of our world. It is not open to the first objection that we urged against the view of Dr. Alexander, for the ethos of a people does supply a criterion whereby to evaluate every attitude of will which men must regard as good or bad. On the other hand, it does not meet the other two difficulties that were raised against social institutions as the source of a criterion. Like these, the ethos of a people, while affording a criterion for the mass of men, is not good enough for the best men. They, in truth, speed on the progress of the ethos, because they continually strive to employ a standard that is rooted in the ethos, but yet has corrected its defects. These defects are essentially those of lack of unity and consistency, and the responses evoked by

the ethos are accordingly fragmentary and incongruous. The ethos of a people lacks ethical unity, and, with this as a criterion, the character developed in man could not form a harmonious and consistent whole. Nevertheless there are two reasons why this ethos is the criterion generally employed and accepted as satisfactory. The first is, that the mass of men habitually occupy a limited point of view. and within this range of vision the defects are not apparent. The second is, that the ethos, or morality of our world, is actually far higher in the scale of perfection than that to which men generally have attained. Only for the best men of the age does it fail as the criterion, for they have already so far attained, and in process of that attainment a more coherent and unified criterion has emerged. From this higher level, conduct in accordance with the ethos could no longer be described as good, it could neither satisfy nor be the object of choice since it would be seen to violate that demand for unity and coherency which belongs essentially to every rational soul.

This seems to point to the conclusion that the organised point of view, with reference to which particular acts of will ultimately derive their value, must be a complete, harmonious or rational one. Good, in an ultimate sense, therefore, is that which a being possessing a perfectly rational soul, would inevitably choose and with which he would be satisfied. A particular attitude of will to its object is, accordingly, only completely good if it is congruous with the attitude of a perfectly rational soul to the same object. In comparison with this criterion we find all degrees in the perfection of goodness. This is illustrated by further reference to the analogous distinction between more and less. This involves an implicit reference to the limiting conceptions zero and infinity which are the ideal termini of the scale of quantity. All the quantities which experience presents fall somewhere between these two. Likewise the attitudes of will towards objects, which can be called either good or bad fall somewhere within a scale of value whose ideal limits are completely irrational and Vol. XXIX.-No. 4.

completely rational choice. The attitudes of will of a man, whose life is habitually determined by a very limited point of view, have a place low down in the scale. He chooses irrationally and must continually frustrate himself by his selection of incongruous objects. He is divided against himself and forever enslaved. The objects that he chooses must indeed be called good in that he regards them as capable of satisfying his wants but from any standardised point of view they must be condemned as bad. With the ethos as the criterion they would be so condemned, for lacking in unity and complete rationality as the ethos undoubtably is, it yet possesses these characters in a far higher degree than is embodied in the attitude towards life of the vast majority of men. There are, indeed, relatively few men in any age whose points of view are more rational than that which is embodied in the morality of their world. Any individual should therefore be chary of setting up his private conceptions of moral value in opposition to those which represent the accumulated rationality of his world.

VIII.

The foregoing account in some measure unfolds the significance of good when it is predicated in an ultimate sense, but it seems rather to indicate the form than the content of the rational point of view. This is a limitation that characterises all ideals as such—they indicate the truth but not in all its richness and concreteness. would not on that account be right to conclude that they are therefore barren as a source of guidance. The abstract ideal of rationality enables us to form judgments of value in the qualitative sphere just as our inadequate conception of infinity enables us to form certain judgments in the quantitative one. Our conception of the content of a rational point of view is necessarily inadequate as long as the ideal is unrealised. Could we fully conceive of perfect rationality both in form and content we should already have attained it. All notions that we form of it are relative to our finite and imperfectly rational point of view. At the same time it is never difficult to discern the content of a more rational view than that which we have formulated at present. Here, as everywhere throughout the scale of evolution, the next step higher is practically anticipated before it is theoretically known. Our actual practice is pregnant with a higher rationality than that of which we are theoretically aware. Only by trying to act rationally do we learn what rationality means. This was the truth urged by Kant when he insisted upon the primacy of the practical reason. In like manner, if you try to act loyally with regard to existing social institutions you will become aware of the rational ends or purposes that these institutions serve; then and then only will you be in a position to see where these ends lack unity and coherency and so be capable of passing to a higher level of rationality. You must live as rationally as your world before you can formulate to yourself a higher stage of being. Every act we do enriches or impoverishes the content of the ideal of rationality that is gradually shaping itself within us. The dim and abstract anticipation of this ideal, which is a sufficient guide to make us feel that one attitude of will is good and another bad, will if we act upon it, become more concrete and significant, and so afford a more certain guide in the complex issues of life. The ideal is not something foreign to our practice, but is already imperfectly embodied in it, for the recognition of the unfulfilled possibilities of this practice, which comes to us in our best moments, indicates the direction in which further rationality is to be attained. No man is so ignorant of the content of rationality as to persistently fail to realise what he might yet make of his life if only he could consistently act upon a less distorted. incoherent and one sided view of things.

One can hardly close a consideration of the meaning of good without reference to the question whether, with perfect rationality, choice and with it the distinction between good and bad, would not inevitably disappear. It would seem that this must be the case, for the rational soul in

seeking to grasp the full content of the world could not choose or be satisfied with anything other than the whole harmonious system of experience. Such a soul would be beyond all those preferences and exclusions which our finite minds set up. Amid all the variety, complexity and immeasurability of its world no thing would be negated but each would have its place and contribute its quota to the infinite meaning of the whole system.

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